

Nonviolent Civil Disobedience: Creating Legitimate Regime Change in Iran

**A Monograph
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Abstract

Nonviolent Civil Disobedience: Creating Legitimate Regime Change in Iran by MAJOR John T. Selman Jr., ARMY, 50 pages.

War, diplomacy and economic sanctions are three cornerstones of strategy that have, in the past, successfully coerced rogue regimes to capitulate. However, it may be time to look beyond these persuasion techniques and develop a new method that can lead to regime change. During the 20th Century, there have been several nations that have successfully transitioned from authoritarian rule to democracy. The transitions were hastened by nonviolent civil disobedience. Although nonviolent civil disobedience is a common form of political action throughout the world, many political observers do not understand its nature and often underestimate its effect.

Nonviolence is built on three key components that are found in most non-violent campaigns. By examining case studies it was possible to identify each component and its importance in a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. The key components are mobilization, strategy, and ethics. South Africa's nonviolence campaign demonstrated the power individual groups possess when they come together as one against a regime. South Africa's minority population was successfully mobilized and the ANC used protests, strikes and boycotts to undermine the economy. When the economy collapsed, so did the regime that had profited from the corrupt handling of economic affairs. South African protestors were also able to draw worldwide support when they convinced other nations that apartheid was immoral. The successful overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos can be attributed to the same components of nonviolent civil disobedience. Like South Africa, several individual groups came together to protest the Marcos regime when Marcos declared martial law to avoid defeat in a democratic election. Philippine protestors used boycotts and strikes to tear apart the economy. When the military realized that Marcos no longer had control of the population, the Chief of Staff disavowed the regime. Once the military capitulated, Marcos' power disintegrated. In each case popular opposition was mobilized based on an ethical appeal to concepts of justice. The strategy in each case involved obstructing the economy which in turn undermined the regime and support for the regime.

By comparing these case studies to the conditions in Iran and Iran's 1979 Revolution it was possible to assess whether non-violent civil disobedience can be organized in Iran with some likelihood of successfully replacing the regime. The 1979 Iranian Revolution contained many of the aspects of non-violent regime change. Iran presently has many of the same disaffected groups who might again be mobilized. Those groups possess the resources and could build the infrastructure to support a non-violent revolution. Lastly, the regime's centralization of the economy has led to economic grievances that cannot be addressed by the present regime. The regime's use of Islamic law to limit participation and stifle dissent means the grievances extend from the economic system to undermine the government's moral authority. The international community has judged the human rights conditions in Iran and has harshly criticized the government. Hence, non-violent action has the prospects of generating international support for those Iranians who would use non-violent civil disobedience to overthrow the regime. Nevertheless, the presence of these conditions alone cannot produce a revolution. The difficulty in a repressive regime is finding a group or leader who can mobilize the population. The ethical component involves exploiting Islam's emphasis on social justice and the unequal distribution of wealth to criticize and ultimately undermine the regime.

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Introduction

War, diplomacy and economic sanctions are three cornerstones of the United States security strategy. The cornerstones have been the means that have, in the past, successfully coerced rogue regimes to conform to U.S. will. However, it may be time to look beyond these persuasion techniques and develop a new method that can lead to regime change. During the 20th Century, there have been several nations that have successfully transitioned from authoritarian rule to democracy; the transition hastened by nonviolent civil disobedience. Freedom House, in July 2005, found that among the 67 transitions from authoritarianism to democracy in the past 33 years, 50 can be attributed to nonviolent political action.¹ Although nonviolent civil disobedience is a common form of political action throughout the world, many political observers do not understand its nature and often underestimate its effect.

Nonviolent civil disobedience consists of numerous elements, but nonviolent civil disobedience is not understood as a whole. Mahatma Gandhi usually comes to mind when thinking of nonviolent civil disobedience. He was the meek, short, Hindu man who wore the traditional Indian dhoti and shawl, and a pair of round-rimmed glasses that barely covered his eye sockets. While appearing meek, Gandhi led India out of British colonization in 1947. Images from that period show British soldiers repressing the passive Indian protestors. While protesting is important, the media rarely showed the true nature of nonviolent civil disobedience. It is more than peaceful demonstrations. In fact, peaceful demonstrations only serve to unite people in support of the cause, but seldom weaken a regime. Weakening a regime takes action that tears apart the political bonds that hold the government together. Nonviolent civil disobedience is not passive. “Nonviolence does not typically begin by putting flowers in gun barrels...it involves the

¹ Jack DuVall and Hardy Merriman, “Dissolving Terrorism at Its Roots,” International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, <http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org> (accessed January 27, 2007).

use of a panoply of forceful sanctions such as strikes, boycotts, civil disobedience, disruptions in government functions and nonviolent sabotage”.² Nonviolent civil disobedience can be properly described by words like forceful and sabotage. Nonviolent civil disobedience requires militant action.

Nonviolent civil disobedience is very militant. When asked whether nonviolence was active or passive, Gandhi replied, “It is the greatest and activist force in the world...a force which is more positive than electricity and more powerful than ether.”³ Nonviolent civil disobedience seeks to accomplish what German historian Hans Delbrück’s defines as a strategy of exhaustion.⁴ It literally wears the government down. It targets the political infrastructure, economy and social structure rendering a government powerless and giving people little faith in the government’s ability to govern. The will of the people can outweigh the strength of the government.⁵ When people realize their government is vulnerable, the popular opposition to the government may galvanize and facing wide spread opposition, the government may not have the capacity to stop the movement without making concessions. People who have seen their favorite sports team win a thrilling game can envision the fans rushing the field. During the game, few dare to enter the playing field because security is quick to apprehend them. Conversely, when every fan takes a notion to rush the playing field at once, authorities cannot stop them. Gandhi said, “The people, when they become conscious of their own power, will have every right to take possession of what

² Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall. “With Weapons of the Will: How to Topple Saddam Hussein Nonviolently,” *Sojourner’s Magazine* 31, no. 31 (September – October 2002): 1.

³ Jack DuVall, “Civic Power and the People’s Rights: Nonviolent Action for a New World” (lecture, Male, Maldives Islands, August 2006).

⁴ Gordon A. Craig, Delbrück: The Military historian in Peter Paret, ed. *Makers of Modern Strategy* p. 341

⁵ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 153.

belongs to them.”⁶ Like fans at a sporting event rushing the field, when the people unite government authorities are powerless.

Nonviolent civil disobedience works in a multitude of nation-states regardless of culture, ethnicity, race or religion. Throughout the 20th century, nonviolent, civil disobedience campaigns in places such as South Africa and the Philippines exhibited routine characteristics that made each campaign successful. The collapse of apartheid in South Africa has been attributed to a campaign of nonviolent civil disobedience.⁷ From 1948 to 1994, South Africa’s white National Party “maintained a peculiar combination of democracy and racial exclusion.”⁸ The system permitted a white minority to dominate the black majority. From the inception of apartheid, blacks struggled to end segregation. Often individual black groups used tactics that were violent, but the better-equipped and trained military forces could easily repress the movement. It was not until the 1980s, 40 years later, that anti-apartheid forces united. Protests elevated awareness on a worldwide scale to the point that it significantly reduced economic aid to the government. Boycotts and strikes collapsed the regime’s financial base. Finally, in 1990, “The anti-apartheid movement succeeded in forcing the government to negotiate a democratic transition to a unitary, nonracial state.”⁹ The white National Party was not defeated by armed conflict, but rather by nonviolent civil disobedience.

The end of the government of Ferdinand Marcos was also marked by a significant nonviolent political campaign. President Ferdinand Marcos declared martial law on September 1972. Marcos implemented martial law and argued that marital law was necessary to prevent

⁶ Jack DuVall, “Civic Power and the People’s Rights: Nonviolent Action for a New World” (lecture, Male, Maldive Islands, August 2006).

⁷ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 57-58.

⁸ Elizabeth Jean Wood. *Forging Democracies from Below*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 112.

⁹ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 68.

overthrow by a communist insurgency. Others believed martial law was intended to prevent Benigno Aquino from defeating Marcos in a democratic election.¹⁰ Martial law allowed Marcos to rule as dictator. Several opposition groups decried martial law and ultimately united to weaken the Philippine economy. As protests intensified, foreign countries denounced Marcos' actions. The most notable country to withdraw support from Marcos was the United States. The United States at the time was trying to contain the growth of communism in Southeast Asia. Given the commitment to opposing communism, the United States' actions demonstrated that even the United States saw through Marcos's claim that martial law was intended to thwart a communist insurgency. With international support waning, the economy shattered and most importantly, the military's defection from Marcos, the people were successful in reestablishing democratic rule.

Regime change has one intended purpose and that purpose is to topple the existing government and replace it with another one. Regime change occurred for both South Africa and the Philippines. Sometimes regime change is confused with political change. Gene Sharp, an eminent theorist of nonviolent action, "identifies four mechanisms through which nonviolent action can produce political change: conversion, accommodation, nonviolent coercion, and disintegration."¹¹ Whenever a government views the situation as the activists do and create laws or change policy then conversion occurred. Often a government will capitulate when activists create too much havoc. Though the government is not converted, they will accommodate activists to quell the insurrection. Conversion occurs when the insurrection grows so powerful that the government can no longer control the population. Coercion usually occurs just before the government disintegrates. The Civil Rights Movement successfully converted the United States government during the 1950s and 1960s. The Civil Rights movement brought about political

¹⁰ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 68-69.

¹¹ Gene Sharp. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973), Ch. 3.

change.¹² In the United States, like South Africa and the Philippines, disenfranchised citizens were mobilized. Dr. King activated black Americans to protest injustices such as Jim Crow laws that segregated blacks and whites though claiming that each race had equal accommodations and opportunities. Dr. King's activism brought national and international attention to prejudice against black Americans. Money flowed in from very influential sympathizers to pay for the Civil Rights Movement. Boycotts and sit-ins regionally affected economies making it difficult for businesses to stay open. The Civil Rights Movement darkened the United States' image especially at a time when they were trying to influence the world that democracy was a better alternative than communism. The exploitation of racial injustices on an international level helped lead to the passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. Civil rights activists did not topple the United States government in 1964. Nevertheless, the U.S. civil rights movement illuminates the requirements for achieving political goals through nonviolent civil disobedience.

The principles of nonviolent civil disobedience that were applied successfully in political campaigns in South Africa and the Philippines may be applicable to achieving the United States' goal of regime change in Iran. Iran is causing disturbances throughout the Middle East that could have far-reaching consequences for the rest of the world. They are developing nuclear weapons, supporting anti-Israeli terrorist organizations in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, and supporting Shia militants in Iraq. The United States does not intend to tolerate these activities and has stated so in the United States National Security Strategy. The National Security Strategy makes clear that the United States seeks to curb Iran's influence throughout the Middle East. Chapters III, IV and V of the National Security Strategy addresses strengthening allies to defeat terrorism, working with others to diffuse regional conflicts and preventing enemies from attacking allies

¹² Martin Luther King Jr. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Clayborne Carson, ed., (Time Warner Books, 1998), 244.

with weapons of mass destruction.¹³ The United States is not alone in its thoughts about Iran. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, “We are determined to prevent the threat posed by an Iranian military program.” In addition, “Iran is a threat [not only] to Israel...but to the world. The international community cannot show any hesitation.... Any hesitation on our part is being perceived as weakness.”¹⁴ Though Chancellor Merkel has strong opinions about Iran, she and the rest of the world are hesitant to use military power.

From the State Department to the White House to the highest reaches of military command, there is a growing sense that a show down with Iran may be impossible to avoid.¹⁵ Neoconservative Norman Podhoretz adds, “The plain and brutal truth is that if Iran is to be prevented from developing a nuclear arsenal, there is no alternative to the actual use of military force anymore than there was an alternative to force if Hitler was to be stopped in 1938.”¹⁶ Contrary to Mr. Podhoretz’s claim, The United States certainly does not have the capacity to wage another war while bogged down in Iraq. Additionally, United States military action in multiple countries has fueled antiwar opposition worldwide.¹⁷ Most of Washington’s allies have made it clear they will not join another overseas gamble.¹⁸ Other nation-states believe the United States would wield its military might against Iran as it did against Iraq. Fortunately, there is a feasible alternative to war and diplomatic sanctions that has the possibility of toppling the Iranian government. Nonviolent, civil disobedience can be cultivated in Iran to effect regime change

¹³ The National Security Strategy of the United States of America, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/nsc/nss.html> (accessed February 28, 2008).

¹⁴ Associated Press, “Putin Blasts U.S. for its use of Force,” *Yahoo News* (February, 2007), <http://news.yahoo.com/s>

¹⁵ Michael Duffy, “What Would War Look Like?” *Time*, September 25, 2006, 39.

¹⁶ “The Revolution Strikes Back,” *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 3.

¹⁷ Jack DuVall and Hardy Merriman, “Dissolving Terrorism at Its Roots,” International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, <http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org> (accessed January 27, 2007).

¹⁸ Michael Duffy, “What Would War Look Like?” *Time*, September 25, 2006, 39.

because the Iranian political system exhibits many of the characteristics that have enabled peaceful regime change in other authoritarian regimes during the 20th century.

The record of nonviolent regime change shows that the successful use of nonviolence is built on three key components: mobilization, strategy and ethics. By examining case studies primarily from South Africa, the Philippines and the United States it was possible to identify each principle and its importance in a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. Then by comparing the conditions in Iran and Iran's 1979 Revolution it was possible to assess whether non-violent civil disobedience can be organized in Iran with some likelihood of successfully replacing the regime. The evidence suggests that Iran is a suitable target for a non-violent movement.

Mobilization

Nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns must mobilize a very large population and involve that population in activism to cause regime change. Large groups of people give nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns the necessary mass to develop the momentum needed actively erode the political structure. "If a sufficient number of people disobey or do not cooperate for a sufficient amount of time, the government will be unable to rule, regardless of its coerciveness or brutality."¹⁹ This fact is at the heart of nonviolent civil disobedience.

Mobilization is powerful. Building a nonviolent civil disobedience movement is similar to building an insurgency. Mao Zedong ushered communism into China in 1949. He was successful in countering the organized Chinese military by instituting guerilla warfare tactics. He described his insurgent movement as consisting of three stages: develop the movement, spread the movement's influence, and attack for victory of the movement.²⁰ If the first phase is considered the strategy development phase, then the second phase deals with mobilization. The

¹⁹ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 38.

²⁰ Frank D. Pelli, "Insurgency, Counterinsurgency, And The Marines In Vietnam," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1990/PFD.htm>(accessed December 14, 2007).

comparison between non-violent campaigns and armed insurgencies is useful because they both seek the overthrow of a regime. Although insurgencies seek to bring about change through violence which is fundamentally different than nonviolent civil disobedience, nevertheless, the parallels in regard to building an activist movement should not be overlooked. Both non-violent and violent movements must address the willingness of groups to participate, the reasons people do not join, the power of disobedience, and the transition from demonstrations to government disruption. First it is important to realize the power of groups.

Bravado

People are more willing to do things in a group. Civil disobedience movements need to activate a large number of people, too many people for officials to handle.²¹ Malcolm Gladwell, staff writer for *The New Yorker* and author of *The Tipping Point* and *Blink*, writes about the power of people acting as a group. In chapter 6 of *Blink*, Gladwell describes how a car full of police officers acted as part of a group and an innocent man was killed. Gladwell argues that if the police would have operated individually, rather than together, then the chances of that ill-fated shooting would have been low. Gladwell uses the term bravado to explain this phenomenon.²² People acting in groups are willing to do things that people acting individually are not willing to do. Although Gladwell uses the term bravado negatively in terms of police work, bravado is required if nonviolent civil disobedience is to succeed. Bravado is what leads every fan to rush the field after winning a football or soccer game. There is a sense that for the security to prevent the rush to the field everyone would need to be arrested and that is unlikely. There is just not enough security. Unless a regime is willing to murder the entire population, its ability to compel

²¹ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 100.

²² Malcolm Gladwell. *Blink: The Power of Thinking without Thinking*. (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2004), 264.

compliance through repression is not infinitely elastic.²³ When people feel like they are not alone, they are more willing to actively participate in defying the government.

There have been some very creative, yet simple, ways to unite people. In 1983, Chileans banged pots and pans citywide in Santiago, Chile and thereby, jelled the population in solidarity and indicated to General Pinochet that he could no longer rule through fear.²⁴ Bell ringing visibly shaped solidarity for the next day's protest.²⁵ Potential participants heard the sounds of pots and bells and were empowered to join the demonstration. Displays of unity encourage others to participate and signal to the participants that the next day's demonstrations will be large and too powerful for the government to repress. When the disaffected populace is aware that others will join the demonstration then they are more likely to participate. A people joining widespread protest reinforce the inclination to participate and provide the movement positive feedback.

Dr. Dietrich Dörner, in his book *The Logic of Failure*, describes positive feedback as an increase in a given variable that produces an additional increase in that variable.²⁶ For example, a large mobilized group grows larger. A system regulated by positive feedback becomes uncontrollable. Positive feedback is the goal of mobilization. The more people join a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign the more likely others will join and the movement becomes larger. Conversely, the more the government is able to control the population, the greater the government's chances to retard or halt the movement. To enlist people into a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign the movement's leaders should start small to avoid government attention and permit the movement to grow.

²³ Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall. "With Weapons of the Will: How to Topple Saddam Hussein Nonviolently," *Sojourner's Magazine* 31, no. 31 (September – October 2002): 1.

²⁴ Ibid, 1.

²⁵ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 131.

²⁶ Dietrich Dörner. *The Logic of Failure*. (New York; Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 1996). 74.

Initial acts of organized opposition are chosen that involve little physical risk to help enlist help of participants.²⁷ Not only should the leadership seek to avoid taking risks, but the leadership should set modest goals for the demonstration. When trying to build confidence in the people, it helps to begin a demonstration over a topic that the government is not as obstinate about. The difference between the struggles for women's suffrage versus Civil Rights in the United States illustrates this point. A popular demonstration in support of women's voting rights raised few concerns within the government than did demonstration for Civil Rights in the South. Therefore, the larger the number of demonstrations that occur without provoking violent repression by the government the more confident people will become when they address more volatile issues. Nevertheless, some people will still not be willing to join a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign.

There are reasons people do not participate in nonviolent civil disobedience. One is apathy. People can only see the costs of resisting instead of the costs that resisters can impose.²⁸ Many feel that one person cannot make a change in what is seen as a huge government. Some Americans have similar feelings about voting in a democratic process. If they feel their candidate does not have a chance of winning then they will stay home instead of voting. They fail to realize that individual votes tabulate into something that is bigger than the individual. Participants must understand that individual efforts do not undermine the government but collective action does. Individual efforts coalesced into broad-based movements destabilize a regime. Although, apathy is not the only reason people do not participate.

A second reason is fear. Corrupt governments can be ruthless. Individuals participating in nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns can certainly be targeted by threats, violence and

²⁷ "Establishing Justice in Muslim Societies: The Role of the People" (Paper, May 2004).

²⁸ Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall. "With Weapons of the Will: How to Topple Saddam Hussein Nonviolently," *Sojourner's Magazine* 31, no. 31 (September – October 2002): 3.

prison. This is why it is important to overwhelm the government. The more people involved decreases the governments ability to repress everyone. Usually only the leaders can be targeted. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was thrown in prison far more often than his followers. Luckily, if done correctly, leaders gain so much media attention that the regime has to act very gingerly when trying to silence them. Any government missteps can bring harsh denouncement by international groups and those denouncements help to muster support for the nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. Regrettably, government action directed at punishing family members is different. Attempts by the government to repressing a protest usually creates greater mobilization, but indiscriminate actions directed at as family members often will demobilize participants in a civil disobedience campaign.²⁹ It takes a strong individual to participate when his life is threatened, but when the government threatens his family then his resolve must increase exponentially. When people overcome their fears, their power cannot be matched.

People power is tremendous. “Sharp maintains that a government’s power over its subjects is based on their obedience and cooperation.”³⁰ As the people join together the government’s efforts to stop the movement become futile. Mobilization, in combination with an ethically based campaign and a strategy, has to move away from protests and seek to collapse the government. Protests are very good for getting a movement recognized but are very susceptible to repression.³¹ Therefore mobilized groups must transition into militant, yet nonviolent, tactics to erode the government’s source of power.

Protests are a wonderful method for galvanizing popular support and the opinions of other nation-states. However protest themselves do very little to cause regime change. What

²⁹ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 116.

³⁰ Gene Sharp. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. (Boston: Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973), 12.

³¹ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 113.

really causes change is creating the general perception that the government can no longer govern. This leads to less overt actions such as boycotts, and sit-outs. When Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. called for a boycott of the Montgomery, Alabama government run bus company the boycott did more than send a message.³² It disrupted the economy. The images of black Americans walking everywhere certainly helped to unite others around the United States but the bus boycott wrecked the local Montgomery economy.

Black Americans worked for half of what their white counterparts did. Though black Americans made less, they still were a viable asset to the Montgomery economy. The bus boycott made travel difficult. Black Americans, out of a lack of convenience, stayed home and therefore did not spend their income in the local economy. The bus boycott had a crippling effect. Moreover, the bus boycott had another unintended consequence that probably was the most useful.

For instance, when black American women could not get to their housekeeping jobs the white women would come pick them up in their own personal vehicles. The whites were not going to stand for unkempt houses and unclean laundry. Black workers were picked up and personally chauffeured by their employers. As an added advantage, the Black Americans no longer had to pay for their bus fare and ride long bus routes. Tacitly, employers all over Montgomery supported Civil Rights by ensuring their black workers got to work. This signaled that whites were not as adamant about Jim Crow laws as suspected and were willing to make concessions in order for their lives to continue as normal. The bus boycott would not have been so successful if not for the collective action of black Americans in Montgomery. Collective action did not come naturally. Collective action worked because Dr. King persistently trained his mobilized force in the ways of nonviolent civil disobedience.

³² Martin Luther King Jr. *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Clayborne Carson, ed., (Time Warner Books, 1998), ch. 7.

Training

It is very difficult to train people to be nonviolent. When the police or military arrive armed and prepared to use force, it is very tough for protestors to stand forth and hold their ground. Serb Republic parliament member Srdja Popovic states that it has a lot to do with training people how to behave when they get arrested, and when they get beaten. Staying calm sends a strong message.³³ It is imperative that activists are trained not to retaliate against the forceful hands of the authorities.

Branch Rickey knew this all too well. Rickey was a white lawyer who almost single-handedly ushered Black Americans into major league baseball. He used to quiz Jackie Robinson endlessly about how to react to fans and players when they spit on him, called him derogatory names or played unusually rough. Rickey knew that if Jackie Robinson retaliated then Black Americans would lose the moral high ground and set baseball's integration back several years.³⁴

In addition, a repressive government often uses provocateurs to turn a nonviolent demonstration to violence.³⁵ Activists must understand how to identify such saboteurs and not succumb to violent reprisal. Not only do activists need training to remain peaceful under duress, but they also must be trained in the strategy and goals of the nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. The extensive training requirements may lead some to ask how thousands of activists receive training without the government noticing.

Training for non-violence actions is no different from a guerilla movement's need to build an armed insurgent force covertly under the government's nose. Hundred of Cubans in the

³³ Srdja Popovic and Steve York, interview by Peter Ackerman, CNN Sunday Morning, CNN, March 17, 2002.

³⁴ Alan Axelrod. *Profiles in Audacity: Great Decisions and How They Were Made*. (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 177-178.

³⁵ Stephen Zunes, "Recognizing the Power of Nonviolent Action," *Foreign Policy in Focus* (March 2005): 2, <http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views/05/0331-31.htm> (accessed January 25, 2007).

Sancti Spiritus province of Cuba were covertly trained by the American Central Intelligence Agency to support the Bay of Pigs Invasion. Governments have covertly trained indigenous groups on their own soil for years. Usually the training involves use of weapons which is loud and attracts attention. If groups can be trained with weapons in their own land then it is reasonable to assume that a quiet, nonviolent civil disobedience campaign can be trained without notice. According to Stan Mathias of Stan Mathias Ministries, his evangelical organizations literally train thousands of Chinese every year undetected by Chinese officials.³⁶ Even missionary groups covertly train ministers and parishioners to meet without detection by the government in countries that oppose public worship. Groups that meet in opposition to a regime must operate covertly or else they may suffer violent repression. Covert meetings are a way to mobilize disaffected groups in lieu of resorting to violence against the regime.

Violence

Using violence against the government in a civil disobedience campaign is perilous. In one opinion, the world has not entered an era where non-state actors can challenge the state.³⁷ Nation-states usually have very formidable militaries. “The structural process of state making and state expansion, as well as increased monopolies on the technologies of violence by states, contributed to a shift in the balance of power away from armed insurgents and toward state forces in many places.”³⁸ This is not to say that violent insurgencies have not toppled regimes with robust militaries. The likelihood that civil disobedience campaign can match the strength of the

³⁶ Stan Mathias, “Stan Mathias Ministries” (Sermon, Church of the Harvest, Olathe, KS, August 26, 2007).

³⁷ Jack DuVall and Hardy Merriman, “Dissolving Terrorism at Its Roots,” International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, <http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org> (accessed January 27, 2007).

³⁸ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 16.

government in violence is unlikely. Not only does the government have military overmatch, but they are usually trained to use overmatch.

The police and military are trained to fight not put down peaceful protests.³⁹ An example of the police controlling nonviolent protests with violence is the anti-Vietnamese war protest at the University of Wisconsin in the 1960s. Police were brought in to disband the students. The police came in wielding their batons and physically abusing students.⁴⁰ That is the way police are trained to cope with situations. The same is true of militaries. More time is spent on the firing range learning how to kill people than politely containing or dispersing them. A mobilized group cannot fight the regime if the regime has superior forces, weapons and training in violence. Therefore, a mobilized group must fight the regime in a way that the regime is not prepared to manage. A successful technique to combat the regime is through peaceful mobilization.

Nonviolence

It is essential to keep civil disobedience peaceful. In contrast to violence, nonviolence creates powerful information operations that work to sway world opinion in support of the movement. Force used against a nonviolent movement creates sympathy toward the protestors.⁴¹ Media focuses on violence. If it bleeds, it reads.⁴² Therefore, when a nonviolent act of civil disobedience is violently repressed without a violent response from the protestors, it builds sympathy for the protestors and increases the likelihood others will join the effort. Nonviolence has worked numerous times against the most repressive regimes. It has contributed to regime

³⁹ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 143.

⁴⁰ “Two Days in October”, PBS, October 17th, 2005.

⁴¹ Stephen Zunes, “Recognizing the Power of Nonviolent Action,” *Foreign Policy in Focus* (March 2005): 2, <http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views/05/0331-31.htm> (accessed January 25, 2007).

⁴² *Frequently Asked Questions about Nonviolent Conflict* in the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, <http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/faq.shtml> (accessed January 24, 2007).

change in Chile, Bosnia, India, and the Philippines and other countries with brutal regimes. Repressive regimes, such as Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, have resorted to torture, incarceration, and mass murder but, they, nevertheless, were defeated by non-violent groups of citizens.⁴³ In South Africa, 1986- 1988, there was a direct correlation between the number of strikes conducted by activists and the number of economic sanctions by the international community. As the number of strikes rose from 400 to 1200, economic sanctions rose from 20 to 200.⁴⁴ The international community supported the nonviolent methods of civil disobedience.

Strategy

The most successful nonviolent movements envision a better future for the public.⁴⁵ Often there are several opposition movements within a nation-state that have grievances against the regime yet they do not work together. Opposition groups may coalesce into a broad-based movement of ordinary citizens, united behind a simple, straight forward platform that addresses long-standing popular grievances and aspirations.⁴⁶ If the Iranians who were opposed to poor economic conditions united with those opposed to human rights violations then the synergy derived from that effort might overwhelm governmental officials. Opposition groups did unite to overwhelm the government of South Africa. The groups merged 565 organizations together to create one movement called the United Democratic Front. The UDF included “trade unions, youth organizations, student groups, women’s groups, religious groups, professional

⁴³ “Establishing Justice in Muslim Societies: The Role of the People” (Paper, May 2004).

⁴⁴ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 85-87.

⁴⁵ Jack DuVall and Hardy Merriman, “Dissolving Terrorism at Its Roots,” International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, <http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org> (accessed January 27, 2007).

⁴⁶ “Establishing Justice in Muslim Societies: The Role of the People” (Paper, May 2004).

organizations, and civic associations.”⁴⁷ Although many of the organizations had different grievances against the government, they all rallied to pursue the goal of ending Apartheid. Once the UDF organized to end Apartheid, they realized that the best way to collapse the government was through the economy.

Economy

Nonviolent movements follow a strategy for action that dissolves the government’s sources of political and economic support.⁴⁸ The most popular objective of past nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns has been to undermine the economy. Often the economies of countries ruled by authoritarian regimes rely on one source of national income and the government’s direct involvement in that one industry usually leads to its corruption. Nowhere does the axiom of “it’s the economy stupid” resonate more loudly than with corrupt regimes. If the economic might comes from one product then very few people can manipulate the system and hold power. An example is oil. In a country dependent on oil exports, threats to the production become a serious government concern. If a movement’s goal is to disrupt the economy then a strike or boycott by oil workers can be tremendously effective. Oil workers possess specific skills that are not found in the public at large; consequently, the government has little recourse but to address the workers’ grievance. The government cannot imprison or murder the activists without accepting the loss of revenues and a decline in government income. One undesirable consequence of collapsing the economy is that the government will no longer be able to provide services that the public relies on. Therefore, attention must be made to creating a parallel infrastructure.

⁴⁷ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 59.

⁴⁸ “Establishing Justice in Muslim Societies: The Role of the People” (Paper, May 2004).

Parallel Infrastructure

Another part of the strategy is to build capacity outside that of the government with which to support the humanitarian needs of the people. During the 1990's, Albanians rose up in protest to Serbian genocide. "After protestors were killed, they sought to create parallel institutions such as schools, health facilities to rival the government's institutions."⁴⁹ Third-world countries depend overwhelmingly on governmental support for their social systems. Most citizens cannot afford health care or an education. If a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign is going to financially bankrupt the regime then public services are usually the first programs to be cut. The government actually uses this fact as a threat to suppress the activists. Denying healthcare, educational opportunities and other programs creates a burden on society, forcing the people to turn their allegiance back toward the government. For that reason, opposition movements must create parallel organizations. "Parallel institutions provide for the people creating functional equivalents of the state institutions."⁵⁰ This feat is tricky but not impossible and requires help from international sources. Normally resources for healthcare, medicine, food and education to sustain a parallel infrastructure must be provided by agencies operating outside of the current regime. Parallel infrastructures require a globalized effort by institutions that side with the nonviolent civil disobedience campaign.

During the 1980s, groups within the Philippines took creation of parallel institutions to a higher level. Movements attempted to build an indigenous economy outside state control.⁵¹ Not only did activists try to establish social systems, but also they attempted to establish an entire

⁴⁹ *The Nonviolent Movement in Kosovo and Yugoslavia* in Mother Jones, http://www.motherjones.com/news/special_reports/total_coverage/Kosovo/history/html

⁵⁰ Stephen Zunes, "Recognizing the Power of Nonviolent Action," *Foreign Policy in Focus* (March 2005): 3, <http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views/05/0331-31.htm> (accessed January 25, 2007).

⁵¹ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 84.

economy that by-passed the government. They were succeeding when the Marcos regime toppled.

Resources needed to create and sustain parallel institutions can be moved across borders without government detection. Historically, militaries have covertly moved resources in and out of foreign countries continually. If weapons and sustenance can be moved around at will in a foreign country then supplies and personnel can be moved in support of nonviolent civil disobedience. Even with a parallel infrastructure, other conditions must be achieved to ensure a successful civil disobedience campaign. Another condition is co-opting leaders that can help undermine the regimes authority.

Co-option

Co-opting governmental officials is another strategy that contributes to a successful nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. Transferring allegiances from one source of authority is critical in nonviolent movements.⁵² Co-opting high-ranking, well-liked regime members pays off in several different ways. First, turncoats within the regime can alert activists if the government is planning to repress, kidnap or murder leaders or participants. They can also submit key legislation and openly debate government officials in support of a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. A question exists though of who should be co-opted.

It is important to split the government. Find those who will stand to benefit greatly if a regime changes. In the Philippines, “Disillusionment with Marcos’s rule and pressure for change from abroad produced elite divisions between those who benefited from Marcos’s rule and those

⁵² Stephen Zunes, “Recognizing the Power of Nonviolent Action,” *Foreign Policy in Focus* (March 2005): 3, [http:// www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views 05/0331-31.htm](http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views/05/0331-31.htm) (accessed January 25, 2007).

who did not.”⁵³ Usually businessmen who would fair far better by entering the global economy can be co-opted. Politicians vying for power over the current regime can also be co-opted.

Military and police co-option is extremely important to prevent of violent repression. Philippine Chief of Staff General Ramos announced his defection and supported Aquino when it became apparent that the Marcos regime was no longer in control.⁵⁴ With the commander of military forces co-opted, the orders to repress violently the nonviolent civil disobedience movement went unheeded. One Ukrainian general observed after nonviolent protest, “Every soldier is a citizen.” When orders came to crack down, the army and secret service refused. Many of them would join the protest after work.”⁵⁵ Even if the commander cannot be co-opted, soldiers can be. When successful co-option occurs, these turncoat leaders can provide a solid foundation to establishing an interim government until a legitimate election occurs.

Interim Government

An overlooked strategy during nonviolent civil disobedience is planning for an interim government. Civil disobedience should be able to handle catastrophic success.⁵⁶ Often planning for the initial stages of a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign overshadows planning for what happens afterward. Whether it be laws, a new constitution or assuming the national debt, planning must be undertaken and in place for regime change. In the absence of a viable central government many groups may attempt to seize power. As much will be lost with a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign as gained if a capable government is not immediately resurrected. A

⁵³ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 72.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 78.

⁵⁵ Jack DuVall, “Civic Power and the People’s Rights: Nonviolent Action for a New World” (lecture, Male, Maldive Islands, August 2006).

⁵⁶ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 109.

successful interim government is the last part of the strategy for a successful nonviolent civil disobedient campaign. Not only is it important to have a viable strategy for nonviolent civil disobedience, it is important that the cause to remove the regime must be ethical.

Campaign Ethics

Truth

When asking the people to participate in non-violent action to promote regime change, it is important that the cause possess an ethical basis. Campaign ethics require at least three components: truth, legitimacy and morality. Gandhi used the word Satyagraha to describe the nonviolent activist. Satya means truth, Graha means firmly holding to something.⁵⁷ If a cause is not truthful then it will not hold together under scrutiny or under violent repression. Leo Tolstoy wrote, “Violence can never destroy what is accepted by public opinion.”⁵⁸ The public accepts the truth more often than it accepts lies. What is more, if the government can prove that a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign is mendacious, the participants will become disaffected and the cause will falter. Conversely, nonviolent power grows in proportion to its adherence to the truth.⁵⁹ South Africans were truthful in their claim that apartheid was a rule of the minority over the majority. It was also true that minorities were grievously discriminated against in terms of pay, positions of authority and representation in government. As a result, their nonviolent civil disobedience campaign grew to a measure that mobilized the South African majority to confront the Apartheid regime. The campaign grew to such an overpowering force that the South African

⁵⁷ Sanderson Beck, “Nonviolent Action Handbook,” <http://san.beck.org/NAH1-Nonviolence.html>(accessed January 25, 2007).

⁵⁸ Cynthia Boaz and Jack DuVall. “Defying Violence with Democracy: Why Grassroots Civil Society- and not ‘Nation Building’ from on High- is Key to the Future of Iraq,” *Sojourner’s Magazine* 35, no. 9 (September – October 2006): 5.

⁵⁹ Jack DuVall, “Civic Power and the People’s Rights: Nonviolent Action for a New World” (lecture, Male, Maldives Islands, August 2006).

government had to end apartheid and establish fair elections. In addition to truthfulness, a cause must also be legitimate.

Legitimacy

There has to be a reason for regime change.⁶⁰ If the world looked upon Apartheid as justified then there would not have been international support for the anti-Apartheid movement. Fortunately, South Africa's message that a minority rule over a majority population resonated loudly throughout the world. South Africa's anti-Apartheid message especially resonated in the ears of democratic nation-states who offered aid to South Africa. Therefore, the anti-Apartheid message created the legitimacy needed to rouse world support against the government. Legitimacy will create resources and diplomatic efforts from other nation-states in support of the nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. A truthful and legitimate cause also creates a moral underpinning that strengthens the movement.

Morality

A cause's morality will stimulate the populace's emotions when they would normally not choose sides between nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns and the government. During the American Civil War, 1861-1865, the common Southerner was arguably more adamant about secession than the common Northerner was. Slave emancipation affected the South's agricultural livelihood and therefore stood to lose more. The South did not need a rallying cry to participate in the war effort, however many Northerners were lackadaisical in their support. Two years into the war, President Abraham Lincoln sought to bring the entire support of the North's population into the war. Lincoln issued the emancipation proclamation to give the Civil War a new moral

⁶⁰ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 5.

force.⁶¹ Northerners who had not made a commitment to the Civil War identified with Lincoln's moral rallying cry to free the slaves. This newfound support ultimately help lead to a Northern victory and the United States' reunification.

The characteristics of successful nonviolent civil disobedience are mobilization, strategy and campaign ethics. Each of these elements was present during successful nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns of the 20th Century. The current situation in Iran can be viewed through the lens of successful characteristics of nonviolent civil disobedience throughout the 20th Century. Iran has several of the successful characteristics and seems to be a prime candidate to force regime change through nonviolent civil disobedience.

Iran

Iranian Bravado

The Iran polity has an immense capacity to create a very large opposition movement. Nonviolent civil disobedience has historically succeeded there before. In 1978, the year before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, hundreds of people were killed or injured in Khomeini's hometown of Qom. Security forces had used violence to suppress the supporters of the Ayatollah Khomeini. The supporters protested in favor of toppling the Shah and installed Khomeini into power from exile. After the Islamic mourning period of 40 days had passed in honor of the slain protestors, pro Khomeini supporters held funeral protests that further fostered mobilization.

The funeral protests sparked positive feedback among activists and the movement grew to uncontrollable proportions. Four distinct groups, students, clergy, workers and capitalists mobilized to overthrow the Shah.⁶² The first three groups were analyzed to determine their overall contribution toward mobilization. According to Migsah Parsa, Professor of Sociology at

⁶¹ Alan Axelrod. *Profiles in Audacity: Great Decisions and How They Were Made*. (New York: Sterling Publishing Company, Inc., 2006), 149.

⁶² Migsagh Parsa. *States, Ideologies, & Social Revolutions*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), part II.

Dartmouth College, New Hampshire, students were the first organized group to protest the Shah's regime. The Shah actually set up academic conditions that would ultimately lead to organized nonviolent civil disobedience against him. Thanks to western influences, the Shah instituted policies that allowed under privileged youth the opportunity to attend universities. The most influential school was the University of Tehran. While attending, students who were disconnected from the politics of Iran saw their connected and wealthier classmates receive prime governmental jobs upon graduation.⁶³ An overthrow of the Shah meant a level playing field for coveted governmental jobs after graduation. To exacerbate the problem, many of the students studied Karl Marx's communist theory. The Shah was corrupt. He accumulated power and revenue and only distributed it to a privileged few. Marxist Feda'iyān and Mojahadeen advocated a classless system that naturally attracted poor students.⁶⁴ A socially equal playing field enticed many disenfranchised youth to mobilize against the regime. As vocal as the students were, they did not collapse the regime. They merely connected other disenfranchised groups in Iran.

Iran's university system had extensive communication and press networks. Coupled with the universities' near autonomous status the students were provided an environment in which to mobilize with a degree of immunity and protected from violent repression.⁶⁵ Though the government made some effort to silence the students the universities operated on a global scale and brought attention to the Shah's corrupt regime. Despite their opposition to the Shah, the students did not seek to establish an Islamic society. History shows that Khomeini ushered in a ruthless Islamic regime, but that was an unintended consequence of the student's mobilization. The students just wanted something other than the Shah. Polling that occurred after one

⁶³ Ibid, 98.

⁶⁴ Migsagh Parsa. *States, Ideologies, & Social Revolutions*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 98.

⁶⁵ Ibid, 94.

demonstration found that only 6.3 percent of the protestors were there under the auspices of Islamic ideology.⁶⁶ Islam was not the rallying cry of the students, but their bravado carried over to the clergy who also had grievances against the Shah's regime.

Iran's Shia clergy were not politicized in the initial stages of the Islamic Revolution. However, it is important to note that when the government actively repressed student demonstrations, the clergy condemned violence 100 percent of the time.⁶⁷ Denouncing repression slowly led clergy out of silence and gave them more of a voice during the nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. Then as the clergy were slowly mobilizing, the Shah instituted land reforms intended to appease the groups mobilizing against the regime. Though some activists were pacified by the land reforms, the land reform program mobilized the clergy against the regime. The clergy and mosques held large land holdings that they used as a source of influence and economic power.⁶⁸ The Shah's land reform diminished the power and influence of the clergy. The clergy had a real grievance. The clergy's efforts grew and fed into the student's mobilization. Like the students, clergy also had recognition, communication, press networks and relative immunity from repression. The clergy were able to consolidate other disenfranchised groups together in Iran. Industrialized workers were the most important disenfranchised group.

The workers really caused the Shah's regime to collapse. Credit should be given to the students and clerics for uniting opposition groups and mobilizing the disaffected, but they only served to illuminate grievances. Their actions could not topple the regime. The real militant action came from workers. Initially, workers did not mobilize to oppose the Shah. The Shah's regime was quick to repress labor uprisings because most of the regime's capital was derived

⁶⁶ Ibid 102.

⁶⁷ Ibid 140.

⁶⁸ Migsagh Parsa. *States, Ideologies, & Social Revolutions*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 134.

from the government controlled industries.⁶⁹ However, many workers who attended the mosques became fervent opponents of the Shah. This cycle of worker mobilization occurred throughout Iran. As workers protested, conducted strikes and boycotted the Shah's unfair business practices the Iranian economy began to collapse. Furthermore, oil workers sealed the fate of the Shah's regime. Oil revenue provided the bulk of the revenue needed by the Iranian government. Oil became so scarce that people could not commute to work. Additionally, the military literally ran out of gas, making it difficult for the Army to suppress the opposition.⁷⁰ The Shah stepped down in 1979 when it became evident that he could no longer effectively control Iran. An exiled Khomeini flew in from France and seized control of the Iranian government.⁷¹

Today, Iran exhibits many of the problems that led to the overthrow of the Shah. There is still a strong and active student base in the Iranian university system. "Iranians are also much better educated these days: literacy is near-universal and the student population has soared."⁷² Like the students in the Islamic Revolution, unemployment for young people is severe. Nearly 50 percent of all Iranians between the ages of 25 and 29 do not have jobs.⁷³ According to "Terror Free Tomorrow", eighty-eight percent of young Iranians view the economy as important. In contrast only twenty-nine percent indicated nuclear weapons were an important issue. Seventy-nine percent of young Iranians preferred a democratic system where all leaders, including the Supreme Leader, were elected by direct popular vote.

Clergy are also at odds with the Iranian government. Qom is the religious center for Shia Islam. Located about 60 miles southwest of Tehran, it has educated Iran's clerics for years.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 165.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 171.

⁷¹ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 2.

⁷² "Khomeini's children," *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 16.

⁷³ Ibid.

Ayatollah Khomeini used Qom to begin his revolt against the Shah leading up to the Islamic Revolution. However, many of Qom's Clerics are intolerant of Khomeini's velayat-e faqih doctrine.⁷⁴ Khomeini's doctrine states that until the return of Islam's 12th Imam, a supreme leader is best suited to interpret God's will and Islamic law. Many prominent Iranian scholars disagree with Khomeini's pronouncement. Qom's clergy advocate that there cannot be a legitimate authority to interpret God's laws other than the 12th Imam. Therefore, it is impossible to have a designated person to fill the vacancy of the 12th Imam. This view was even held by Grand Ayatollah Ali Hossein Montazeri who was the Khomeini's designated successor.⁷⁵ This view was not tolerated by Khomeini and Montazeri was imprisoned. Montazeri agreed with cleric Hojatoleslam Moshen Kadivar when he said, "What the conservative leaders are practicing today is not Islam, and I oppose it."⁷⁶ Though popular rhetoric from Qom denies the supreme leader's authority, most support a democratic society as long as leaders do not claim to possess divine authority to interpret law.

The workers are also as disenfranchised today as they were in 1979. The government's industrial capacity declined significantly after the war with Iraq in the 1980s. Iran's primary source of capital is oil revenue. Iran continually directs more investment to nuclear research than it does to other industries.

The three primary groups that mobilized during the 1979 Islamic Revolution stand poised to mobilize again. What is exciting about this bout of mobilization is that all three groups have the potential to mobilize at the same time. Communication methods have increased significantly. Satellite television, cell phone and the internet proliferate throughout Iran. There are

⁷⁴ "The verdict of Qom," *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 13.

⁷⁵ "The verdict of Qom," *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 13.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

approximately 13.6 million cell phone users and 18 million internet users.⁷⁷ Now instead of the students mobilizing, followed by the clerics, then followed by the worker, all three groups can simultaneously coalesce into nonviolent civil disobedience at once. This would make it virtually impossible for the Iranian government to stop the opposition. What is more, since Iran has reduced itself to one primary form of capital generation, oil, the economy might collapse more quickly than it did in 1979. The creation of the oil industry as practically the sole income of the Iranian economy is a colossal mistake. However, it is not Ahmadinejad's only mistake.

Ahmadinejad also made the same mistake that the Shah made in the 1970s. The Shah, while trying to satisfy early movements of the Islamic Revolution, introduced "popular input" to government that opened the door for political groups to mobilize.⁷⁸ Ahmadinejad also allowed several political parties to form in opposition to the current regime in an attempt to mollify the opposition. Iran has a variety of groups engaged in political activity. Some are oriented along political lines and some are based on cultural or religious lines. Political pressure groups conduct most of Iran's political activities. Groups that generally support the Islamic Republic include Ansar-e Hizballah, Muslim Students Following the Line of the Imam, Tehran Militant Clergy Association (Ruhaniyat), Islamic Coalition Party (Motalefeh), and Islamic Engineers Society. Active pro-reform student groups include the Office of Strengthening Unity (OSU). Opposition groups include Freedom Movement of Iran, the National Front, Marz-e Por Gohar, and various ethnic and Monarchist organizations. Armed political groups that have been repressed by the government include Mujahidin-e Khalq Organization (MEK or MKO), People's Fedayeen, Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (KDPI), and Komala.⁷⁹

⁷⁷ CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed January 14, 2008).

⁷⁸ Migsagh Parsa. *States, Ideologies, & Social Revolutions*. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 90.

⁷⁹ CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed January 14, 2008).

Some Iranian opposition groups such as the MEK have been violent. Recently their contingent in Iraq laid down their arms in an effort to help the United States achieve peace. Since the MEK in Iraq and Iran are virtually the same group only separated by geography, it stands to reason that they would be willing to lay down their arms in favor of nonviolent civil disobedience to achieve their goals in Iran. The MEK may realize that working in partnership with others and not engaging Iran's military forces in isolation is the way to cause regime change. In addition to organizations, there are also individuals in Iran that have been working toward political change.

Shirin Ebadi, Lawyer and 2003 Nobel Peace Prize winner, is one of the world's foremost experts and activists in nonviolent civil disobedience. She currently lives in Iran and has a substantial following. The Iranian government considers her a significant threat and has imprisoned her numerous times in the past. Her worldwide notoriety helps preserve her life because it would create worldwide attention if she disappeared or was falsely imprisoned. Ebadi is just one example of individuals championing radical changes within Iran.

The base for activism in Iran is set. With several governmental opposition groups poised for regime change and people in place such as Ebadi, there is sufficient intellectual capacity to launch a massive nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. However, the population has to be trained to carry out a successful nonviolent civil disobedience campaign.

Iranian Training

The Iranian people have the necessary skills and resources to support covert training for activists. First, the literacy rate in Iran is 70.4 percent.⁸⁰ Most illiterates live in desolate places that would prove less useful for nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns. However, the literate population lives in or near large cities such as Tehran, the heart of the Iranian government.

⁸⁰ CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed January 14, 2008).

Literacy makes it possible to train groups through the distribution of printed media. Individual personal training can be reinforced by literature. Distribution of clandestine print media is also useful for synchronizing activists during protests, strikes, and boycotts, and serves to warn groups vulnerable to government suppression.

Iran also has a tremendous pro-western populace. The Shah who was overthrown in 1979 was extremely pro-western. There is a large contingent of Iranians who are secular and reformists in their beliefs. Muhammad Khatami preceded Ahmadinejad as president. “Mr. Khatami had pushed for liberal reforms at home and talked reassuringly to the outside world about Iran’s desire for a dialogue of civilizations.”⁸¹ He was voted out in the 2005 elections due to concerns about the economy, not for his reformist’s beliefs. Khatami’s reformist following still remains in Iran. Meanwhile, Ahmadinejad has increased measures to mitigate the gains of Iran’s internal reformists.⁸² However, mosques still serve as a place of refuge outside the reach of Ahmadinejad.

Friday prayers at Mosques serve to illuminate how many Iranians do not support the religious will of the government. “A speaker denounces Islam’s foes saying shame on you Israel, down with Israel.”⁸³ Although closer examination of the crowd shows older Iranians left over from the Islamic Revolution regime. Young, educated Iranians choose not to participate in Friday prayers while walking around in blue jeans and listening to western music. Women even choose to wear western apparel along with the mandatory headscarf.⁸⁴ These people could offer safe-houses and facilitate training events. It is extremely important to train activists, because the government will most assuredly attack a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. A regime’s use

⁸¹ “The Revolution Strikes Back,” *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 3.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid, 2.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 3.

of violence benefits nonviolent civil disobedience. This statement appears awkward, but government violence serves to unite the populace and international groups. It is important for the activists to restrain themselves in the face of repression, because if they retaliate Iran has a very first-rate security apparatus capable of defeating opposition.

Iranian Violence

Iran has several agencies that share responsibility for law enforcement and maintenance of order, including the Ministry of Intelligence and Security, the Law Enforcement Forces under the Ministry of Interior, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps, a military force established after the revolution. A paramilitary volunteer force known as the Basiji, and various gangs of men known as the Ansar-e Hezbollah (Helpers of the Party of God), or "plain clothes," align with extreme conservative members of the leadership, and act as vigilantes. Civilian authorities do not possess full control of the security forces, and there are instances in which elements of the security forces have acted independently. Both the regular and the paramilitary security forces commit numerous, serious human rights abuses.⁸⁵ Defeating these forces through violence is difficult, but using violence in a campaign gives the nation-state a moral underpinning to use violence in retaliation. Activists using force legitimizes the nation-state's suppression of the protests. Conversely, if the nation-state uses violence against a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign it erodes support for the government. Frequent repression of nonviolent activism comes with enormous human, economic and political loss.⁸⁶ Therefore, military repression is less likely to occur if the government fears the action will erode the nation state's image on a global scale.

⁸⁵ Iran Human Rights Report to Congress, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78852.htm67> (accessed December 18, 2007).

⁸⁶ Jack DuVall and Hardy Merriman, "Dissolving Terrorism at Its Roots," International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, <http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org> (accessed January 27, 2007).

Also violence in a campaign diminishes support from would be fence-sitters. Armed conflicts upset undecided elements who usually seek the protection of better equipped government.⁸⁷ When a protest forecasts violence many would be supporters stay home. When a protest is advertised as nonviolent then supporters participate because they have less reason to fear a violent response by the government. Most importantly, when the government uses violence to repress a nonviolent movement it undermines its support. Not only national, but also international support for the nation-state diminishes. Crucial funds, economic aid and overall financial support needed to keep the government functioning declines to a point at which government authorities must consider capitulating to the will of the people. Government attacks against unarmed groups can spark a full-scale peaceful insurrection.⁸⁸ It is important for the regime's opponents to resist the urge to fight back because nonviolence serves to win the information war.

Iranian Nonviolence

Over 50 international groups participate in Iran's economy, politics and society. Some of the most notable are International Monetary Fund, Organization of the Oil Exporting Countries, International Atomic Energy Agency, World Trade Organization and the United Nations.⁸⁹ These groups do not interact with Iran independently. Most are part of a complex, intertwined web of support that connects virtually every nation-state in the world. Enormous pressure can be brought to bear on Iran from these international supporters if they violently repress a legitimate and moral nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. Iran may be able to tolerate internal pressure

⁸⁷ Stephen Zunes, "Recognizing the Power of Nonviolent Action," *Foreign Policy in Focus* (March 2005): 2, <http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views/05/0331-31.htm> (accessed January 25, 2007).

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed January 14, 2008).

from its people, but it may not be able to endure combined pressure from internal groups and international organizations. Nonetheless, the international community is unlikely to do anything unless the Iranian people unite and rise up to shake off their existing government. Iran's Islamic culture creates an environment in which to wage a nonviolent campaign.

Most Iranians are devout Shia Muslims. "There is complete compatibility between methods of nonviolence and Islamic values and beliefs."⁹⁰ As a result of actions by radical Muslims such as Osama Bin Laden, Islam is viewed negatively by many Westerners. Of course the radical Islamist gets all the press coverage but the Islamic world is replete with examples of nonviolence. Perhaps the most poignant example is Iran's Islamic Revolution in 1979.⁹¹ Unfortunately, many Westerners believe that all of Iran has radical Muslim views. The Iranian government is radical, but most of Iran's populace is capable of conducting nonviolence in the same way they did during the Islamic Revolution.

Several American hostages were taken during the Islamic Revolution in 1979. Media images from that period are engrained in American minds and perpetuate the image of Iranians as people of violence and hate. Just as all Muslims are not like Osama Bin Laden, all Iranians are not like the fundamental reformers that took Americans hostage. Most Iranians are peace-loving individuals. They only want to prosper and provide a happy and healthy life for their families. It is time for the Iranian people to stand up and heed the words of Muhammad's successor, Prophet Abu Bakr al-Siddia. He said, "Obey me as long as I obey God in my rule. If I disobey him, you will owe me no obedience."⁹² Currently, some Iranians may conclude that Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad governs in a way that is contrary to God's laws. If Ahmadinejad was following God's rule then he would adhere to the fourth pillar of the Islamic faith which is

⁹⁰ Mohamad Abu Nimer, "Nonviolence in the Islamic Context," *Common Grounds News Service*, Washington D.C., January 24, 2007.

⁹¹ "Establishing Justice in Muslim Societies: The Role of the People" (Paper, May 2004).

⁹² Ibid.

Almsgiving. Almsgiving is the act of giving resources to the underprivileged.⁹³ “High oil prices in recent years have enabled Iran to amass nearly \$70 billion in foreign exchange reserves. Yet this increased revenue has not eased economic hardships, which include double-digit unemployment and inflation.”⁹⁴ Therefore, when Ahmadinejad invests millions of dollars into a nuclear program instead of taking care of his unemployed population, then some Iranian people may conclude that they owe no allegiance to Ahmadinejad. Iranians can rid the country from tyranny, ameliorate the economic and civil rights conditions, protect the Middle East community from nuclear war and help foster a lasting peace in Iraq. The quickest way to rid Iran of Ahmadinejad’s tyranny is to target the economy.

Iranian Economy

Fortunately, for those contemplating civil disobedience, Iran’s economy is not diversified. A bloated, inefficient state sector, over reliance on the oil sector, and statist policies create major distortions throughout Iran's economy. According to a 2006 estimate, the state controls most of the economic activity. Private sector activity typically consists of small-scale workshops, farming, and services with a shortage of skilled labor.⁹⁵ Disruption of their oil industry could destabilize the government. “Oil revenues bring in some 80 percent of export earnings.”⁹⁶ Oil workers, working as part of a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign might cause the Iranian government to collapse. The Iranian government cannot wantonly repress boycotting or striking oil workers unless the government is prepared to endure long stoppages in oil production. The nonviolent civil disobedience movement could use the threat of disrupting oil

⁹³ Raphael Patai. *The Arab Mind*. (New York: Hatherleigh Press, 2002), 162.

⁹⁴ CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed May 8, 2008).

⁹⁵ CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed January 14, 2008).

⁹⁶ “The Big Squeeze,” *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 10.

production to dissuade violence. The Iranian government would financially collapse before they could recruit and train sufficient replacements for the oil workers. However, mobilizing oil workers to oppose the government is a significant problem. Iranian oil workers have job stability. While other segments of the population struggle to provide income for their families, oil workers, while not rich, can afford an adequate lifestyle. Optimistically, this is the point when the clergy become so important in the Iranian culture. Typically, oil workers would want to keep their jobs when others around them are unemployed. The clergy might be able to persuade oil workers that striking would eventually create a better Iran for all its citizens if the clergy can communicate the injustices of the Iranian government.

Another benefit of targeting the oil industry is the world's reliance on oil. The Iranian people, not the Iranian government can leverage a disruption of the oil supply. Oil prices would skyrocket. In 2006, the main importers of Iranian oil were Japan, 14 percent; China, 12.8 percent; Turkey, 7.2 percent; Italy, 6.3 percent; South Korea, 6 percent; and Netherlands, 4.6 percent.”⁹⁷ As an example, Japan's imported Iranian oil constitutes 11.5 percent of Japan's oil imports.⁹⁸ 11.5 percent may seem a small proportion of Japan's needs, but with oil demand outpacing oil production worldwide, this oil cannot be easily obtained somewhere else. The same would be true for the other nations importing Iranian oil. Consequently, these countries would work feverishly to reestablish the oil supply. The importing countries have close political and economic ties to developed, democratic nation-states. Some, such as the United States, have directly been threatened by Iran. Also, Iran is fourth in the world in producing and in exporting oil.⁹⁹ Taking their 4.12 million barrels per day off the market would certainly affect the global

⁹⁷ CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed January 14, 2008).

⁹⁸ Oil Hungry Japan Looks to Other Sources, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Japan/IB21Dh01.html> (accessed May 8, 2008).

⁹⁹ Top World Oil Producers, Exporters, Consumers, and Importers, 2006, <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0922041.html> (accessed May 8, 2008).

supply system, and send oil prices skyrocketing. Oil price increases on that scale could have a cataclysmic effect on the globalized economy, and more importantly, on the Iranian economy and on the well-being of the Iranian people.

Iranian Parallel Infrastructure

Iran's demographics and geography support the creation of covert parallel institutions. "Only roughly one-half of Iran's 70 million people are ethnic Persians, the rest being Azerbaijanis, Kurds, Arabs, Turkmen, Baluchis, and Lors. In the eyes of many observers, this unusual diversity makes Iran not so much a nation-state as a multinational empire dominated by Persians."¹⁰⁰ Opposition groups are plentiful in Iran and they grow exponentially further away from Iran's capital of Tehran. Opposition groups can create a vast network of resources to develop and hide a parallel infrastructure from the government. Both indigenous and foreign groups can resource the parallel infrastructure. Iran's populace is educated. For instance, doctors and business people are prevalent in Iran. Foreign groups such as doctors without borders can provide medical resources to the Iranian people. Another international organization is the Peace Brigades International (PBI) which covertly organizes volunteers to demonstrate in foreign lands and create complex problems for the government.¹⁰¹ There are areas that even the Iranian president cannot safely travel. After his inauguration, Ahmadinejad pledged to visit all of Iran's provinces, but "As of his first anniversary as president, however, he had visited only about half of them, and a number had effectively become off-limits for him because of escalating ethnic and

¹⁰⁰ John R. Bradley, "Iran's Ethnic Tinderbox," *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 1, Winter 2006-07, 181.

¹⁰¹ Stephen Zunes, "Recognizing the Power of Nonviolent Action," *Foreign Policy in Focus* (March 2005): <http://www.commondreams.org/cgi-bin/print.cgi?file=/views/05/0331-31.htm> (accessed January 25, 2007).

sectarian tensions.”¹⁰² Even if Iran’s government attempted to terminate the parallel institutions, they would have a difficult time operating in areas that were vehemently opposed to the regime. Tehran could also provide a safe haven to parallel institutions. Tehran’s 11 million citizens are mostly disenchanted with Ahmadinejad’s regime. Tehran’s voters proved this by not voting for the candidates Ahmadinejad supported during the municipal elections and elections for the Assembly of Experts in December, 2006.¹⁰³

Iran’s geography also supports covert development of parallel institutions. Iran has two ports on the Caspian Sea to the north and three ports on the Persian Gulf to the south. One port alone, Shaheed Rejaee, on the Persian Gulf handled 2.5 million containers in 2005 and is expected to handle 3.5 million by 2010.¹⁰⁴ Iran has sufficient port traffic that not all containers can be efficiently inspected. In addition, the Persian Plateau on the east and west Iranian borders make it impossible to interdict all incoming supplies. Seas and mountains facilitate Iran’s black market and illegal drug operations. “Despite substantial interdiction efforts, Iran remains a key transshipment point for Southwest Asian heroin to Europe and Iran has the highest percentage of the population in the world using opiates.”¹⁰⁵ Iran has been unable to stop these drug shipments which have led to many Iranians being addicted to drugs. Use of the black market tactics would certainly allow resources for parallel institutions to move in and out of the country freely. Before parallel infrastructures could realize their full potential, knowledgeable people within Iran have to be co-opted.

¹⁰² John R. Bradley, “Iran’s Ethnic Tinderbox,” *The Washington Quarterly* 30, no. 1, Winter 2006-07, 182.

¹⁰³ “Men of Principle,” *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 5.

¹⁰⁴ Ahmed Derakhshan, Irma Pasukeviciute, and Michael Roe, [http://www.istiee.org/te/papers/N30/08%20Derakhsahn%20\(61-76\).pdf](http://www.istiee.org/te/papers/N30/08%20Derakhsahn%20(61-76).pdf) (accessed May 8, 2008).

¹⁰⁵ CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed January 14, 2008).

Iranian Co-option

Iran has several persons and groups that might be co-opted into supporting nonviolent civil disobedience. On the political front Iran is experiencing a new trend in politics. The government permitted the formation of political parties and they have in turn given stiff competition to the controlling Islamic Revolutionary Party. Even though the unelected Council of Guardians uses Sharia Law as an excuse to block the participation of many of these political parties, their existence shows that some Iranians are not satisfied with their government. The political parties have been successful in loosening the grip of the current government. “A loose pro-reform coalition called the 2nd Khordad Front, which included political parties as well as less formal pressure groups and organizations, achieved considerable success in the elections for the sixth Majlis in early 2000.”¹⁰⁶ This is important for co-option because opposition groups all have leaders that are seeking access to power in the Iranian government. Regrettably, opposition groups whose thoughts are too far from the supreme leader’s thoughts will never be legitimately elected. Isa Saharkhiz, managing editor of *Aftab*, a reformist monthly, believes that reformists will never win an election because the Council of Guardians will simply disqualify candidates.¹⁰⁷ These opposition groups can use a nonviolent civil disobedience movement as support to potentially have their party democratically elected. Even with co-option, there are still obstacles to overcome in a nonviolence campaign.

The biggest obstacle to employing nonviolent civil disobedience successfully in Iran is the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IGRC). This military organization was formed for the sole purpose of protecting the Iranian leadership. The IGRC is equivalent to Saddam Hussein’s Republican Guard. The military protects the government as they practice corruption and become

¹⁰⁶ CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed January 14, 2008).

¹⁰⁷ “Men of Principle,” *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 5.

wealthy at the people's expense. Ahmadinejad "wrought havoc inside the economically important Management and Planning Organization by replacing experienced technocrats with friends from his Revolutionary Guards."¹⁰⁸ In return for protection, the government handsomely rewards military members with money and prestigious positions. Iran's president is a former Islamic Revolutionary Guard member. He has championed placing IGRC members in positions of importance. IGRC commercial interests have prospered and contracts have tripled from \$4 billion to \$12 billion under Ahmadinejad's tenure.¹⁰⁹ It is in the best interest of the military to repress a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign because the men who control the military also prosper from the current regime. Violent repression will likely result when activists systematically collapse the economy.

It will be difficult to survive efforts by the IGRC to repress the opposition. Nonviolence has worked in spite of the government's brutality. General Pinochet of Chile was brutal, but toppled. Nonviolent leaders were assassinated in South Africa yet the nonviolent campaign still prevailed.¹¹⁰ Nonviolent civil disobedience has withstood the most violent of regimes in the past and there are glimmers of hope from within the IGRC. Akbar Ganji, a former Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps leader turned political activist and journalist is still a major force within Iran.¹¹¹ Ganji seeks to discard Iran's theocracy with a secular democratic system. He has the ear of many activists groups and more importantly military elites. Activists can use Ganji to dissuade the military's willingness to use violence against nonviolent opposition. Activists like Ganji are the ones that are capable of forming an interim government once the current regime falls.

¹⁰⁸ "The Big Squeeze," *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 11.

¹⁰⁹ "Men of Principle," *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 6.

¹¹⁰ *Frequently Asked Questions about Nonviolent Conflict* in the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, <http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/faq.shtml> (accessed January 24, 2007).

¹¹¹ State Department Report, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm> (accessed January 05, 2008).

Iranian Interim Government

The work to transition Iran into a stable government may not be too difficult. Iran's constitution is not inherently flawed. The current government is flawed. The British helped create Iran's parliamentary system. The constitution functions even with Sharia law oversight. Both the British and United States operated in Iran throughout the 20th Century before the Islamic Revolution in 1979. A considerable number of Iranians are pro-Western. There are still many leaders from the pre-Islamic Revolution government. They could effectively operate the government until legitimate elections were held. These leaders, who understand political and economic systems can work as an integral part of the nonviolent civil disobedience campaign and help establish the government once the current regime capitulates. One change in Iran's constitution should be eradication of the Supreme Leader.

The Iranian political system includes some very powerful unelected governing bodies. The unelected part of government is a significant problem for the political structure. The Ayatollah Khomeini adopted a doctrine known as velayat-e-faqih after the Islamic Revolution.¹¹² This doctrine allows a Supreme Leader to sit atop Iran's political structure. Because the Supreme Leader is appointed by the Assembly of Experts and is not popularly elected, the Supreme Leader is not accountable to the public for bad decisions. The Assembly of Experts, or Majlis, is a popularly elected body of 86 religious scholars constitutionally charged with determining the succession of the Supreme Leader.¹¹³ The velayat-e-faqih system has promoted Supreme Leaders from within its own ranks since the constitution's creation in 1979 and serves to block reformist actions by any elected official. In fact, many of Ahmadinejad's antics are directly attributable to the Supreme Leader. Ahmadinejad "is neither Iran's dictator nor the master of its nuclear

¹¹² "Men of Principle," *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 4.

¹¹³ CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed May 8, 2008).

program, which comes under the supervision of the Supreme Leader.”¹¹⁴ Toppling the president is only one facet of regime change in Iran. To topple the government the velayat-e-faqih must be eradicated.

An Iranian Ethical Campaign

Truthfulness, legitimacy and morality create an underpinning that unites activists and international support in support of the movement. Regimes will have a difficult time disputing the claims made by a nonviolent civil disobedience campaign. Currently there is an array of truthful, legitimate and moral grievances in Iran that might serve as the basis for nonviolent civil disobedience. Iranians hold several grievances against the government. Some of the grievances are economic, some relate to the social system and others are grounded in human rights complaints. Iran’s industrialization efforts during the 1970s and 1980s were stifled and “were worsened by the war with Iraq and the decline in world oil prices beginning in late 1985.”¹¹⁵ Now the oil industry, which is state run, dominates the economy with virtually no industrial-base. The clerics who support the current Iranian regime control up to a third of the country’s economy and exercise considerable influence over political decisions.¹¹⁶ Clerics can influence decisions that will place them in positions of importance or reward them financially.

Corruption contributes to the poor economic conditions. Wealth consolidation and limited industrial capacity have led to a 20 percent unemployment rate.¹¹⁷ Compounding high unemployment is the large number of refugees fleeing neighboring Afghanistan and Iraq to escape the turmoil there. The labor pool continues to increase without a proportionate increase in

¹¹⁴ “Bombs Away,” *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 7.

¹¹⁵ State Department Report, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm> (accessed January 05, 2008).

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

job growth. Add to the unemployment situation an estimated fifteen percent inflation rate and Iran's economic future becomes bleak.

Another cause of economic concern is Iran's poverty rate. An estimated 40 percent of Iranians fall below the poverty line.¹¹⁸ This number can be attributed to an inept regime but there is more to this reality. "Relatively high oil prices in recent years have enabled Iran to amass nearly \$60 billion in foreign exchange reserves, but the national wealth has not eased the economic hardships such as high unemployment."¹¹⁹ Iran could invest in industrialization that increased job growth. Instead, Iran invests that money into development of a nuclear program. In 2002, a dissident revealed two Iranian reactors built in secret in Arak and Natanz.¹²⁰ Secret reactors led some in the International Atomic Energy Agency to believe that Iran is enriching uranium and making plutonium for nuclear weapons. Instead, Iran could use money programmed for nuclear facilities to support social programs or to expand their industrial capacity. Iran refuses despite incentives from other nations. On June 6, 2006, China, France, Germany, Russia, the United States, and United Kingdom offered Iran a substantial package of economic cooperation and assistance.¹²¹ This economic incentive was conditioned upon Iran complying with the International Atomic Energy Agency directives. The incentives were withdrawn when Iran failed to comply. This further demonstrates that Iran is more interested in creating a regional hegemony in the Middle East instead of acting in the best interest of its citizens. Iran neglects its population by not providing economic relief, and they also neglect their population by conducting human rights violations.

¹¹⁸ CIA Fact Book, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ir.html> (accessed January 14, 2008).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ "Bombs Away," *The Economist*, July 21, 2007, 7.

¹²¹ State Department Report, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm> (accessed January 05, 2008).

Iran violates virtually every category recorded by human rights groups. “Reformist members of Majlis were harassed, prosecuted, and threatened with jail for statements made under parliamentary immunity.”¹²² The Majlis is equivalent to the United States Congress. Iran claims to have a fair democratic government, but when credible opposition groups threaten to gain power the Council of Guardians prevent them from continuing in the democratic process. Unfortunately, there are many more severe examples of human rights abuses. “In June 2005 a court sentenced a man to have his eyes surgically removed. According to human rights specialists, such sentences were rarely implemented; rather they were used as leverage to set ‘blood money’.”¹²³ “Journalists were frequently threatened and sometimes killed as a consequence of their work.”¹²⁴ These two examples serve only to outline the injustices on humankind by the Iranian government. The Iranian government murders and tortures opposition leaders. They are also imprisoned, and denied habeas corpus. Lastly, to ensure opposition groups’ rhetoric doesn’t spread, the Iranian government restricts freedom of press, freedom of speech and freedom of assembly¹²⁵ These infringements to the overall welfare of the Iranian populace in conjunction with economic woes and failure to contribute resources to the social system provide enough credible reasons to call for regime change.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ State Department Human Rights, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2006/78852.htm> (accessed December 18, 2007).

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ State Department Report, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/5314.htm> (accessed January 05, 2008).

Conclusion

“Georg Sorenson warns of the dangers of utopianism in peace research, that is, putting forth nonviolence as the brilliant solution to all social problems.”¹²⁶ Nonviolent civil disobedience will not work in every case where there is a need for regime change. There are several examples such as China’s Tiananmen Square where anti-government protestors were defeated. Iran conversely has several characteristics that have led to successful nonviolent civil disobedience campaigns in the past. It may be possible to cultivate nonviolent, civil disobedience in Iran to effect regime change because Iran exhibits many of the characteristics seen to be related to peaceful regime change in other successful campaigns during the 20th century.

Even today, there are several nonviolent civil disobedience actions occurring worldwide. Many realize that nonviolent civil disobedience is the only lasting way to create regime change. There are nonviolent movements currently in Burma, Zimbabwe, Tibet, Belarus and the Ukraine.¹²⁷ These groups realize that attempting regime change through violent, insurgent movements is difficult because the government is far stronger militarily. Iran should be added to the list.

Iran is causing disturbances throughout the Middle East which could have far reaching impacts on the rest of the world. Currently the United States views Iran actions unacceptable and a threat to the security of the Middle East region and the world. Iran’s nuclear power program make be the precursor to developing nuclear weapons and Iran supports anti-Israeli terrorist organizations in Syria, Lebanon and Palestine, and Shia militants in Iraq. Domestic Iranian grievances arising from the deplorable economic condition and human rights abuses may provide

¹²⁶ Kurt Shock. *Unarmed Insurrection: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 171.

¹²⁷ *Frequently Asked Questions about Nonviolent Conflict* in the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, <http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/faq.shtml> (accessed January 24, 2007).

legitimate and moral grounds for opposition. The government cannot deny that these conditions exist.

In addition to a growing basis for domestic opposition, there are within Iran groups that could ably implement one of several strategies for exploiting nonviolent civil disobedience. Iran's one commodity export economy creates a vulnerability to worker disobedience and unrest that potentially might destroy the economy. Disruptions in Iranian oil production certainly would cause concern in the world oil market and grab the attention of world governments. The attention might lead to some action by international communities to resolve internal Iranian conflicts. Hence, there is the possibility that the domestic opposition could exploit the situation to advance its goal.

Iran also has the ability both demographically and geographically to support parallel institutions as the economy crumbles around them. It is imperative that public services like health care are available to prevent activists from leaving the nonviolent civil disobedience campaign and realigning themselves with the government.

Iran also has several viable candidates for co-option into civil disobedience. There are numerous government opposition groups willing to seize power and control the government. Iranians must be sure that the leaders co-opted in support of nonviolent civil disobedience will not be worse than the current regime in which they are trying to change.

Iran's constitution is also viable. When the regime capitulates there is no need for excessive work to revise the government. Thanks to oversight from the British, Iran's parliamentary government is not inherently faulty. Coupled this with existing moderate leadership from before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Iran's government seems to have the potential to function without too many problems.

Iran's students, clergy and disenfranchised workers all have a valid reason to mobilize. The Ahmadinejad regime is not favored by the people. Some report that corrupt elections and iron fisted rule is the only reason Ahmadinejad is in power. Since he has power he will be

reluctant to give it away. It will take the Iranian people to rise up and defeat him through activism.

Lastly, Iranians must cause regime change through nonviolence. The government security apparatus is too strong to mount a violent, military type insurgency. Iranians can only speak through nonviolence. Plus, nonviolence will place a spotlight on Iran that will cause the international community to help delegitimize the Iranian government and contribute to its change.

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